

## **La Crosse FRO Accomplishment Highlights Report**

### ***Outreach:***

#### **La Crosse Fishery Office Assists Upper Mississippi River Refuge with Ice Fishing Day** **03/01/03**

*This is an annual outreach activity that stimulates USFWS interaction with local children to help teach the public about a very important natural resource and a local cultural tradition.*



On March 1, 2003, members from the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge - Winona District hosted an Ice Fishing Day for about 30 first-time anglers on Lake Winona, Winona Minn. Upper Mississippi Refuge staff – Winona and La Crosse Districts, and La Crosse Fisheries Resource Office staff teamed up to teach the young anxious anglers about ice fishing. Winona District volunteers and members of the newly formed Friends of the Upper Mississippi Fishery Services helped out as fishing guides for the children who were between the ages of 2 and 10. Heidi Keuler from the La Crosse FRO presented information on ice safety and fish identification to the youthful group. Some of the topics covered included: clothing to wear, how to tell the difference between a bluegill and a crappie and what to do if someone falls through the ice. Rob Hirschboeck spoke about some of the laws of ice fishing, and Brian Stemper taught the mechanics of ice fishing. The patient crew of anglers was rewarded with excellent weather conditions and about 100 fish total!

**Heidi Keuler**

### ***Habitat Restoration and Conservation:***

#### **Endangered Mussels Arrive at Genoa National Fish Hatchery** **03/26/03**

*It is hoped that the hundreds of thousands of juvenile mussels produced at the hatchery will help halt the drastic downward population trend in the region's river systems brought about by habitat loss, invasive species, and water use practices.*

Whether you notice the willows in bloom, observe the high flocks of geese winging north, or hear the spring peepers calling frantically from dusk 'til dawn, the crew at Genoa National Fish Hatchery knows spring has finally sprung with the arrival of the year's first gravid mussel to the facility. This annual event is the midpoint of a year-long process to help recover threatened and endangered freshwater



unionids in the Upper Mississippi River system. Planning for the arrivals began approximately one year prior with the spawning of wild and captive fish for the production of the thousands of host fish required to carry out the complicated life cycle of these organisms. Nine species of fish are currently being propagated at the hatchery in expectation of multiple restoration and recovery projects in four states in Region 3 this year. Several species of state and federally listed endangered mussels will be propagated on the facility during 2003, with special emphasis on recovery efforts for the Higgins eye Pearlymussel. The recent arrival of 21 gravid female Higgins eye's mark the beginning of the annual multi-agency effort to bolster populations of this mussel in the upper Mississippi River, as well as reintroduce this mussel to areas of the watershed where it has been extirpated. These first mussels are the vanguard of scores of mussels scheduled to contribute larvae at the facilities mussel propagation unit during the spring and summer of 2003. It is hoped that the hundreds of thousands of juvenile mussels produced at the hatchery will help halt the drastic downward population trend in the region's river systems brought about by habitat loss, invasive species, and water use practices. For more information about this program or the opportunity to assist in recovery efforts for freshwater mussels contact Roger Gordon at the facility at 608-689-2605.

**Roger Gordon**

### ***Outreach:***

#### **La Crosse USFWS Resource Center and Genoa NFH Receive Visit from Westby School**

##### **District Students**

**04/02/03**

***Students learned about careers in fisheries, fish health, refuges, law enforcement, and wetlands and how education influences the careers of USFWS employees.***



Thirty students from Westby Area School District visited the USFWS Resource Center in Onalaska, Wis., and the Genoa National Fish Hatchery on April 2. Junior and senior Westby High School students from Steve Huntzicker's natural resource class and four Chaseburg Middle School students from Paul Taylor's class heard presentations from Scott Yess and Heidi Keuler (La Crosse Fishery Resource Office), Terry Ott (La Crosse Fish Health Center), Jim Nissen (Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish

Refuge – La Crosse District), Tom Dahl (National Wetlands Inventory Office) and Randy Lilla (La Crosse District Refuge Law Enforcement Officer). The students learned about different careers from each office at the resource center and observed equipment used by biologists and law enforcement officers. Students were given information on how education influenced the careers of the employees. The students then headed to Genoa NFH where they learned about hatchery operation and were taken on a tour with Nick Starzl, a fishery biologist. Coaster brook trout, rainbow trout, native mussels, lake sturgeon, and the incubation of eggs were just a few things the students observed. Doug Aloisi, Roger Gordon, Dan Kumlin and several volunteers from Genoa NFH showed the students the process of artificially spawning of northern pike.

**Heidi Keuler**

## ***Outreach:***

### **Local School Groups Use Genoa National Fish Hatchery to Further Outdoor Education** **04/02/2003**

Twenty-five students from Westby High School and 35 students from Vernon County and La Crosse area home school groups were given a demonstration in northern pike spawning and freshwater mussel ecology at the Genoa National Fish Hatchery, April 3.

Students were given the opportunity to participate in northern pike egg collection procedures and even got to get up close and

personal with a lake sturgeon as part of a lesson in sturgeon biology. Students were shown live adult mussels that they might see in the upper Mississippi River basin and learned about the fascinating life cycle of these underwater sentinels of water quality. The threat of aquatic nuisance species in our freshwater lakes and rivers was emphasized throughout the tour. Students also had good questions on the effect of zebra mussel populations on freshwater mussel populations in the Mississippi River.



**Doug Aloisi**

## ***Outreach:***

### **Region 3 Director Robyn Thorson Visits USFWS Resource Center Staff in Onalaska, Wisconsin** **04/17/2003**

*Director Robyn Thorson initiated a personal working relationship with staff and developed an understanding of each programs' contribution to the mission of the USFWS. The Director also gained great insight on how local Service partners contribute to our mission.*

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Resource Center Staff in Onalaska, Wisconsin had the great privilege to welcome the new Region 3 Director, Robyn Thorson, to their office on April 17th. Director Thorson had a busy day starting with a 'Meet and Greet' facilities, a visit with local Service Genoa National Fish Hatchery. Genoa National Fish Hatchery, La Crosse Fish Health Center, National Services, Onalaska Law Enforcement Wildlife Refuge and Upper La Crosse and Winona Districts were vision for the future. She challenged utilize a stronger voice nationally. management style and also asked and listened carefully to the ideas of astonished the attentive listeners by after meeting them only briefly once received a sense of Director Robyn her quick wit and charisma, and truly



at the Resource Center, a tour of the partners, and then finally a tour of Approximately 60 employees from Crosse Fishery Resource Office, La Wetlands Inventory Office, Ecological Field Office, Trempealeau National Mississippi Wildlife and Fish Refuge - present to listen to Director Thorson's Region 3 employees to stand up and The new director explained her what kinds of things needed attention, the employees. The Director remembering each employees name before the meeting. Employees really Thorson's positive personality through feel that she is "one of us." The



employees thank the new Regional Director for taking the time to meet them and for learning what they do for the mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and look forward to her leadership.

**Heidi Keuler**

### ***Habitat Restoration and Conservation:***

#### **Saving the Higgins' Eye Pearlymussel from Extinction**

**04/28/2003**

***“Saving the Higgins’ Eye Pearlymussel (*Lampsilis higginsii*) from Extinction: 2002 Status Report on the Accomplishments of the Mussel Coordination Team” can be downloaded to review a variety of conservation activities to save the federally endangered species.***

Since 2000, a variety of conservation measures have been implemented by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers with assistance from the interagency Mussel Coordination Team to save the federally endangered Higgins’ eye pearlymussel (*Lampsilis higginsii*) from extinction. Conservation activities were required by a Biological Opinion provided to the Corps in April, 2000 for continued operation and maintenance of the federal 9-Foot Channel Project on the Upper Mississippi River. A variety of conservation activities have been implemented including genetics studies, mussel culture at the Genoa National Fish Hatchery, cage culture in the Upper Mississippi River and tributaries, stocking juvenile mussels, relocating adults, stocking glochidia inoculated fish, cleaning and stockpiling adult mussels, and survey/monitoring activities. These activities are presented in a new report entitled “Saving the Higgins’ Eye Pearlymussel (*Lampsilis higginsii*) from Extinction: 2002 Status Report on the Accomplishments of the Mussel Coordination Team”. The report can be downloaded from the new Internet web site “Freshwater Mussels of the Upper Mississippi River System” currently in development with the U.S. Geological Survey. ([http://www.umesc.usgs.gov/mussels/documents/mct\\_2002\\_status\\_report.pdf](http://www.umesc.usgs.gov/mussels/documents/mct_2002_status_report.pdf))

**Gary Wege**

### ***Habitat Restoration and Conservation:***

#### **Abundant Bluegills, not Bluebills, on Polander Survey**

**04/29/2003**

***This study will help determine which fish species prefer the new habitats created by the habitat project which will help provide insight to project design in the future.***



La Crosse FRO initiated a new project this year as requested by the Upper Mississippi Wildlife and Fish Refuge - Winona District. The study is designed to determine fish usage in Polander Lake’s new island complex. These islands were constructed as part of the Habitat Rehabilitation and Enhancement Project (HREP) on the Upper Miss. Several HREP’s have islands as a feature built into the project. The goal of these islands is to help break up wind fetch which should reduce suspended sediments. The islands also create slack water habitat which promotes vegetation growth and provides food and cover for both fish and wildlife. The islands also create nesting habitat for waterfowl and turtles. Fishery monitoring was conducted on April 28th and 29th and will be repeated during summer and fall, which will help determine seasonal use. Both electrofishing and trap netting are being conducted at fourteen sites. Bluegill

were the dominant species collected, during April, and were present at several sites. Rock bass were also plentiful but were collected primarily on the rock rip-rapped portions of the islands. Other species present included; carp, largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, freshwater drum and northern pike. The fish collected were weighed, measured and released. This project is a great follow up to the paddlefish work which was conducted in Polander last year.

**Scott Yess**